

Methamphetamine in Montana

A Preliminary Report on Trends and Impact January 2007

Overview

The societal and financial costs of methamphetamine use in Montana are devastating.

Methamphetamine in Montana: A Preliminary Report on Trends and Impact is an assessment of the status of the meth problem in the state. It was prepared by collecting and analyzing available local law enforcement data, drug task force incident reports, crime lab toxicology reports, hospital discharge and admission information, Montana survey results, national reports, state department records and interviews with participating agencies. When possible, multiple years of data were examined to establish trends. This preliminary report summarizes key methamphetamine indicators.

Preliminary Findings

- Attitudes are changing. Public awareness of methamphetamine is very high. Teens, young adults and parents are now more aware of the specific, negative consequences associated with meth use. The perception that meth use carries 'great risk' of negative effects has increased substantially across all age groups.
- Supply may be decreasing. In 2006, the number of incidents in which meth was suspected or seized by law enforcement agencies was the lowest since 2002. Clandestine meth labs requiring Drug Enforcement Administration cleanup dropped from a high of 122 in federal fiscal year 2002 to a low of one in the first three months of FFY 2006.
- Meth use appears to be declining. Workplace drug testing statistics indicate a 73 percent decrease in the number of people in Montana testing positive for amphetamine/methamphetamine in 2006, a greater decline than in any other state. As reported by teens, their meth use dropped 38 percent, from 13.5 percent in 1999 to 8.3 percent in 2005.
- Meth-related crime is decreasing. Drug tests on people charged with "possession" showed a drop in those testing positive for meth – from 56 percent in 2005 to 25 percent in 2006. Meth-related crime increased by 21 percent from 2004 to 2005, but dropped by 53 percent in 2006.
- Meth's social and economic impact remains high. Approximately 50 percent of Montana's adult inmates are incarcerated due to meth-related crimes. And more than half of the parents whose children are placed in foster care use meth.

Attitudes

The Montana Meth Project has developed a campaign to significantly reduce the frequency and prevalence of methamphetamine use in Montana. In the project's first 15 months, we have seen impressive reductions in the levels of use and crime, as well as very significant changes in youth attitudes towards meth.

Montana uses two instruments to measure how young people view the risks associated with methamphetamine:

- The Prevention Needs Assessment (PNA), administered by the Department of Public Health and Human Services, surveys teens in the 8th, 10th and 12th grades and measures risk and protective factors predictive of drug abuse.
- The Meth Use & Attitude Survey, commissioned by the Montana Meth Project in cooperation with the Department of Justice, measures attitudes and beliefs held by teens, young adults and parents of teens.

In March 2006, the PNA expanded to include four specific questions regarding methamphetamine. The questions measure perceived risk and meth use in the past 30 days, past year and lifetime. The statewide annual survey also measures the age at which meth use begins. When asked about the risks of taking six different drugs, including alcohol, methamphetamine was perceived as the most dangerous; 93 percent of all respondents saw meth as having *great risk*. Montana teens' perception of risk is 10 percent higher than teen perception nationwide. In addition, 73 percent of young Montanans ranked using meth once or twice as having *great risk*, compared to only 54 percent of teens nationally.¹

Great Risk of Use, 2006 Prevention Needs Assessment	
Drug	% Perceiving Great Risk
Daily Marijuana	59%
1 Pack + of Cigarettes	70.50%
Meth	93%

Table 1. 2006 Prevention Needs Assessment

According to the 2006 Montana Meth Use & Attitude Survey, approximately 75 percent of young adults and 85 percent of parents perceive *great risk in trying meth once or twice*. The 2006 survey also found that the perception of risk increased between 2005 and 2006 among young adults and parents for over half of the specific risk factors measured. For teens, the perception of risk increased by more than 10 percent in eight out of 14 risk factors.

Supply

Quantitative data and the experience of some local law enforcement agencies suggest that methamphetamine availability may be shifting. Meth-related seizures, arrests, and clandestine labs are declining.

¹ The 2005 Partnership Attitude Tracking Survey (PATs), conducted by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, found that 83 percent of teens in 6th through 12th grades in the United States believe there is *great risk in taking methamphetamine regularly*, compared to 93 percent of Montana teens.

Anecdotal information reported by the state's drug task forces indicates that methamphetamine availability has decreased in some areas while remaining static in others. In regions where methamphetamine appears to be less available, cocaine and high potency marijuana known as "BC Bud" have increased. Professionals also report an overall rise in the purity of methamphetamine, likely due to the prevalence of crystal meth. Known as "ice," crystal meth is more pure than the meth manufactured in small domestic labs. In some parts of the state, the price of meth has increased.

Meth Labs

In July 2005, Montana enacted strict precursor control laws, which put cold medicines containing pseudoephedrine behind pharmacy counters. Since that time, law enforcement has seen a steady decline in the number of clandestine meth labs in Montana:

- In federal fiscal year 2002, the number of meth labs that required the removal of hazardous materials by a specialized contractor peaked at 122.
- In FFY 2005, that number dropped to 29.
- Since October 1, 2006, the Drug Enforcement Administration has reported only one meth lab in Montana.

Meth Labs Reported by Drug Task Forces, 2001-2006		
Year	Total Labs	% Change
2001	86	-
2002	122	41.9%
2003	89	-27.0%
2004	64	-28.1%
2005	25	-60.9%
2006	15	-40.0%

Table 2: Meth Lab Trends

Meth Seizures

The Montana Board of Crime Control collects data from local jurisdictions and drug task forces using the Montana Incident Based Report (MTIBR). According to MTIBR data, methamphetamine seizures increased steadily between 2002 and 2005, then dropped significantly by the end of 2006. The drop from 2005 to 2006 represents a 51 percent decrease.

Incidents Where Meth Was Seized in Montana	
Year	Incidents
2002	162
2003	350
2004	487
2005	583
2006	284

Table 3. Law Enforcement Meth Seizures

Meth Use

Data measuring meth use supports the positive influence of increased public awareness and dialogue.

Workplace Drug Testing Results for 2005 and 2006

According to the semi-annual Drug Testing Index, Montana had the greatest decline in the nation in the frequency of workers testing positive for meth.² The data compared state-by-state drug tests from the first five months of 2006 to the same period in 2005.

- Montana's overall rate of employees testing positive for methamphetamines fell more than 70 percent between 2005 and 2006 – more than any other state in the union.
- In 2005, Montana ranked 5th nationally in the rate of employees testing positive for methamphetamine in the workplace. In 2006, Montana ranked 39th in the nation.
- In 2005, Montana's positive meth tests in the workplace were 87.5 percent above the national average, compared to one-third below the national average in 2006.

During the same period, two neighboring states – South Dakota and Wyoming – saw increases in their overall positive workplace tests for meth use.

Meth-Positive Tests in the Workplace				
STATE	2005	2006	Change	% Change
Montana	0.9	0.27	0.63	-69.49
Idaho	0.62	0.41	0.21	-34.81
North Dakota	0.46	0.3	0.16	-33.93
South Dakota	0.5	0.53	-0.03	7.68
Wyoming	0.68	0.72	-0.04	5.98
NATIONAL	0.48	0.42	0.06	-12.4

Table 4. Meth-positive workplace tests for 2005 and 2006.

Hospital amphetamine/methamphetamine-related admissions and discharges

The Montana Health Care Association receives inpatient discharge data from all of the medical facilities in the state. This data does not include emergency department admission or discharge information. Health care facilities across Montana report a decline in meth-related activity in 2006³.

From 2005 to 2006, the number of amphetamine/methamphetamine addicted patients reported by Montana hospitals declined by 67 percent, and the number of related poisonings dropped by 33 percent. A survey of Montana hospitals and emergency rooms found that meth addicts account for more patients than any other drug.

² The Drug Testing Index, published by Quest Diagnostics as a public service for government, media and industry, has been considered a benchmark for national trends since its inception in 1988.

³ Based on International Code of Diagnosis (ICD) reporting codes.

Admissions information provided by one of Montana's largest health care facilities shows a sharp decline in meth-related cases over the last three calendar years.

Meth-Related Admissions One Major Montana Hospital	
Year	Admissions
2004	21
2005	23
2006	6

Table 5. Meth-related admissions at one major Montana hospital

Treatment Admissions

The number of addicts who cited meth as their primary drug of choice rose 4.8 percent in fiscal year 2006 from 2005. During the same period, overall drug treatment admissions dropped 15.45 percent.

Montana Drug Treatment Admissions (unduplicated)			
Year	Meth	Other	% of Total
2005	1,009	6,698	15.06%
2006	1,129	5,663	19.93%
% Change 05-06	11.89%	-15.45%	32.34%

Table 6. Meth addicts admitted to state treatment programs

Teen Meth Use

According to *Montana's Youth Risk Behavior Survey* (YRBS), meth use among Montana high school students decreased by 38 percent over the past seven years – from 13.5 percent in 1999 to 8.3 percent in 2005. The YRBS assists educators and health professionals in determining the prevalence of health-risk behaviors as self-reported by Montana youth.⁴

MT Youth Risk Behavior Survey Lifetime Meth Usage Rates		
	7th/8 th	HS
1999	7.5%	13.5%
2001	5.7%	12.6%
2003	4.6%	9.3%
2005	2.8%	8.3%

Table 7. Self-reported teen meth use.

⁴ Since 1991, the state Office of Public Instruction has participated in the survey that was initiated by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) to identify the leading causes of mortality, morbidity and social problems among youth.

Crime

During 2006, local law enforcement agencies reported a decline in the number of crime incidents in which meth was involved. In one year, methamphetamine seizures by law enforcement agencies decreased by 51 percent. Meth-positive crime toxicology tests in all categories decreased by 45 percent from 2005 to 2006. Finally, Montana saw a 44 percent reduction in meth-positive arrests from 2005 to 2006. In 2006, meth-related crime decreased remarkably.

According to the Incident Based Crime Report (IBC)⁵, overall crime rates decreased by approximately 1.5 percent from 2004 to 2005, and dropped a further 1.0 percent in 2006. Meth-related crime:

- increased by 21 percent between 2004 and 2005, but
- declined by 53 percent between 2005 and 2006.

IBC also tracks a specific drug offense subcategory, defined as violations of laws prohibiting the production, distribution or use of certain controlled substances and the equipment or devices used in their preparation or use. Crimes in this category in which meth was identified dropped by more than 50 percent between 2005 and 2006.

MT Incident Based Reports	
Total Meth-Related Offenses	
2004	1043
2005	1259
2006	589
Total Meth-Related Drug Offenses	
2004	544
2005	655
2006	311

Table 8. Meth-Related Crime Trends

Forensic Science Division Toxicology and Chemistry Reports

The state crime lab provides scientific and technical support to Montana's law enforcement community. The drug chemistry specialists analyze samples of dangerous drugs discovered at crime scenes. The number of cases in which methamphetamine was found decreased from 70 percent in 2005 to 47 percent in 2006, a 36 percent drop.

MT State Crime Lab Chemistry Analysis Cases Identified as Meth			
	2004	2005	2006
Percent ID as Meth	65.3%	69.8%	46.6%

Table 9. State Crime Lab Cases in which Meth was Identified

⁵ The Incident Based Crime Report (IBC) is compiled by the Montana Board of Crime Control. The arresting officer determines related factors, including whether a crime is associated with drugs, the type of drugs involved and whether the criminal is under the influence.

Toxicologists analyze biological samples (blood, urine and tissue samples) to determine the presence of drugs in crimes, the cause of death in autopsies, and to check for evidence of drug use by people on parole and probation. Meth-positive toxicology tests in all categories dropped from 18 percent in 2004 to 10.3 percent in 2006, a 45 percent decrease.

Montana State Crime Lab Meth-Positive Percentage of All Toxicology Tests	
Year	Percent
2004	18.60%
2005	16.70%
2006	10.50%

Table 10. State Crime Lab Toxicology Tests that Identified Meth Use

Toxicology test data also indicates a substantial decrease in possession of methamphetamine, sale of meth, and meth use associated with probation/parolee violations in 2006, compared to 2004 and 2005. Importantly, the number of arrests for meth possession, possession with intent to sell, and sale dropped convincingly.

Montana State Crime Lab Percentage of Meth-Positive Toxicology Tests by Category				
	Possession	Sales	Urinalysis	Ag. Assault
2004	38.10%	66.70%	29.40%	37.50%
2005	56.10%	56.10%	27%	20.00%
2006	20%	1%	19.80%	1.00%

Table 11. Toxicology Results for Drug-related Offenses

Social and Economic Impact

Despite the positive trends outlined above, meth continues to negatively affect the state, particularly in the direct costs of social and correctional services. The additional secondary social, health care, unemployment and workers' compensation costs, and losses in employee productivity, likely more than double the direct costs to the state's human service providers.

Consider these figures:

- 52 percent of the parents of children in out-of-home foster care have lost custody of their children due to meth-related abuse. Cost to the state: over \$12 million annually.
- 50 percent of Montana's adult inmates are incarcerated due to meth-related crimes. Cost to the state: between \$18,000 and \$29,000 a year per inmate. The Department of Corrections spends approximately \$85 million a year for adult secure custody.
- 20 percent of adults in treatment in Montana report meth as their primary drug of choice. Cost to the state: over \$10 million annually.

Total direct annual costs to the State of Montana are estimated to exceed \$49 million annually. The secondary social and work-related impacts more than double the costs listed above.

Summary

Data collected in 2006 indicates that programs recently initiated in Montana have begun to have a significant impact on the state's methamphetamine problem. New initiatives to reduce demand for the drug by raising awareness about the negative consequences of methamphetamine use have dramatically changed attitudes toward the drug. Montana's strict precursor control laws, also enacted in 2005, have reduced the number of clandestine labs in the state. Montana's approach – dedicating significant resources to both prevention and interdiction – is making a difference. The state has made dramatic progress in a number of key areas, and has made gains not seen in most other states.

While the data are preliminary, the evidence available clearly demonstrates that the prevention campaign started in 2005 by the Montana Meth Project has had a positive impact on the State of Montana. Critical indicators point to reductions in meth use, related crime and availability, and to a growing perception of the great risk associated with using this drug.

Combined with other enforcement and prevention efforts, the Montana Meth Project's education campaign has had dramatically positive results. Virtually all Montana citizens are aware of the dangers posed by meth. Early results show that drug use behavior has been altered in the short term.

Ongoing efforts on the part of federal, state and local law enforcement to make the drug less available in Montana will continue to be a priority. However, continuing to execute aggressive prevention and education programs is critical to our efforts to eradicate Montana's methamphetamine problem. By systematically focusing on demand reduction we will continue to set the pace for the rest of the nation in addressing this epidemic.

With the continued educational and prevention efforts of the Montana Meth Project, it is logical to conclude that meth use will continue to decline and, subsequently, hundreds of new users will be diverted from meth addiction.

The *Methamphetamine in Montana: A Preliminary Report on Trends and Impact* was prepared by the Montana Attorney General's Office and the Montana Meth Project. The preliminary trends identified in this report are based on an analysis of a wide range of information including law enforcement data, drug task force incident reports, crime lab reports, hospital discharge and admission information, survey results, national reports, state department records and interviews with participating agencies.